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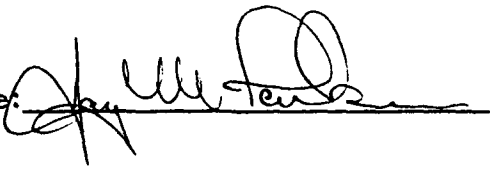NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
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INTO THE WIND, AGAINST THE TIDE: CHANGE AND THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

by

Jay M. Parker
Major, U.S. Army

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INTO THE WIND, AGAINST THE TIDE: CHANGE AND THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

This paper discusses the operational commander's role in ensuring effective change. Its purpose is to answer two basic questions: "(1) What are the barriers to operational commanders' effective responses to change?" and "(2) How can commanders successfully overcome these barriers?". The paper reviews individual and organizational barriers to effective change using historic examples and studies in communication, psychology, organizational behavior, and decision making. The paper concludes by noting that commanders can best ensure effective change by recognizing their own individual limitations and the limits of bureaucratic organizations, by mentoring innovative subordinates, and by accepting personal professional risks to ensure that important innovations are recognized and implemented.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose."
("The more things change, the more things stay the same.")
French cliché

"Armies are always preparing to fight the last war."
Army cliché

Everything old is new again. While the changes that militaries face may seem new, the changes brought on by the end of the cold war are the latest in a long line of challenges faced by the American military as the realities of one era give way to the imperatives of another. The only fixed certainty is that nothing is fixed and little is certain. Throughout US History, the military has faced the impact of new technologies, upheavals in the international environment, and shifting domestic political imperatives. Horses gave way to tanks and airplanes. A continental military became a forward deployed superpower. "Guns *and* butter" was replaced with "peace dividends". Now cold warriors are asked to be peace keepers.[1]

Journals and professional publications are full of articles on the new global threats, both real and perceived. Senior military leaders continue to debate the impact of budget cuts on force capabilities and national readiness. But while much is made of the strategic dimensions of these changes, they also have significant implications for the operational commander.

Operational commanders from theater level down to joint task force serve at the crossroads of changes. They often perform the critical tasks

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[1] For an historic overview of the recurring transformation of the American Military, see T.A. Heppenheimer, "Build-Down," American Heritage, December 1993, pp. 34-46.

of recognizing the need for change and advising the military's senior leadership on effective responses to those needs. But the most important task of operational commanders is ensuring that the responses to those changes are implemented. To accomplish this, operational commanders must introduce new doctrines and new technologies to the force. They must adapt the existing force to new missions, new organizations, and new equipment while providing timely and accurate feedback to the senior leadership. They must "grow" the future force and its leaders. Finally, operational commanders must face the ultimate test. As warfighters, they must lead the force in battle.[2]

The barriers commanders face are considerable. They must swim against a tide of obstacles--both individual and institutional--that have historically frustrated those who sought to ensure that military forces meet the challenges of new eras. The individual professional costs are often high, but costs of military failure are far greater. At Manassas, at Pearl Harbor, in the early days of Korea, and at Desert One, American soldiers, sailors, and airmen paid the costs of military forces unprepared to meet the challenges of "the next war".

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[2]By "operational commander" I am referring to those who command units that conduct and those who train others to conduct operational level warfare. Services have traditionally approached this division of labor differently. While the US Navy has placed a greater emphasis on operational level training and qualification with the fleet, the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) oversees a wide range of specialized units that train soldiers to operate from the squad level through echelons above corps. Particularly relevant to this study are the commanders of the officer advanced branch courses (infantry, armor, aviation, etc.), the Command and General Staff College, and the US Army War College. These commanders are responsible for developing doctrine and providing operational warfare training for those who serve as commanders and staff officers from the joint task force through the theater level.

A number of studies chart the ways that military forces respond to change at the macro level.[3] This paper will focus instead on the operational level, using examples from military history, and studies in the fields of organizational behavior, communication, psychology, and decision making to answer two significant questions:

1) What are the barriers to operational commanders' effective responses to change?

2) How can operational commanders overcome these barriers?

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[3]Among the many recent works on changes in military doctrine and strategy are Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., The Army and Vietnam, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986); Barry R. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984); Jack Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984).

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

> "Change (chanj) v.   1. To make different; alter.   2. To
> exchange: to change places...n. 1. The act or fact of changing.   2. A
> substitution of one thing for another. 3. Something new or
> different; variety..."
> Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary

There are two facts that serve as competing forces in the process of
change. The first is that change is the only true constant. The second is
that individuals and organizations routinely deny this reality, believing
that the status quo of the moment is both permanent and desirable. The
inertia of this denial must contend with the momentum of change.

In studying change and military organizations, it is important to
acknowledge these tensions. It is also important to recognize that the
debate over change is often misdirected. What is at issue is not whether
or not change should occur. Ultimately there is no effective barrier to
change. There are, however, numerous barriers to effective change. The
distinction is in the final outcome. Organizations in general and military
forces in particular either emerge stronger and more capable of performing
their mission, or they are defeated and replaced.

Everett Rogers and Floyd Shoemaker surveyed the vast literature on
innovation, communication, and the individual and organizational dimensions
of change. From that research, they distilled a number of definitions
useful in the study of operational commanders and their role in
implementing effective change. First, they focused on social change,
defined as "the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and
function of a social system. National revolution, invention of a new

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manufacturing technique, founding of a village improvement council...all are examples of social change." "Change," they note, "occurs when a new idea's use or rejection has an effect."[4]

In comparing Rogers and Shoemaker's detailed descriptions of change types, one seems most suited to those made by militaries. This is the two step "contingent decision," requiring a prior innovation decision. The initial decision is an "authority decision," made by the senior leadership of the organization and requiring action by the subordinate, regardless of their personal opinion of the mandated change.[5] The subsequent decision by subordinate commanders to implement the leadership's decision is also, strictly speaking, an authority decision. It differs slightly from the first authority decision, however, in that the subordinate (in this case, the operational commander) must implement the decision but still retains a degree of latitude and autonomy in choosing how to best ensure the final outcome.

Studies have categorized change in military organizations into several types based on the underlying motivation for the change. Waddell summarized the themes of these studies into six basic motives for change: "technology, budgeting, inter service rivalry, military leadership, intra-organizational group conflict, and the impact of the international security environment."[6] These six motives are normally above the operational commander's level of control. He is able to affect the initiation of

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[4]Everett M. Rogers and F. Floyd Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations: A Cross Cultural Approach, New York: The Free Press, 1971), p.7.
[5]Other types of decisions are "optional decisions...made by individuals regardless of the decisions of other members of the system," and "collective decisions...which individuals in the social system agree to make by consensus." Rogers and Shoemaker, Diffusion, pp. 36-38.
[6]Rick Waddell, "The Army and Peacetime Low Intensity Conflict, 1961-1992: The Process of Peripheral and Fundamental Military Change," Unpublished paper, 1992.

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change brought by these motives through advisory input to policy makers who develop the appropriate response. However, he is primarily responsible for implementing the response to these changes. The operational commander is, in the words of Rogers and Shoemaker, responsible for initiating contingency decisions to ensure the diffusion of the innovations.[7]

The force modernization initiatives of the 1970's and 80's provide specific examples of how this occurs and the consequences it holds for the operational commander. With the introduction of new weapon systems into the US Army's inventory came specific changes to force structure, maintenance procedures, logistic requirements, and contingency planning. The M1 Abrahms Tank and the M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle significantly enhanced the firepower available to heavy task force commanders. The ability of armored forces to shoot on the move and the introduction of an improved anti-armor standoff capability for mechanized infantry were matched by changes in the force structure at the lowest unit levels that upgraded the ability to concentrate and control firepower on the battlefield. These were further complimented by modernizations in field artillery and air defense weapons systems, attack helicopter capabilities, command and signal resources, and a host of other combat, combat support, and combat service support assets.

But with these new technologies and new organizations came new challenges. Simple systems became complex and complex systems required complex maintenance and repairs. The M1 and M2 required a logistics capability that could refit and refuel forward while keeping up with the new, high speed vehicles. The task force commander, who in years past might have only been required to focus on the low technology of infantry

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[7]Rogers and Shoemaker, _Diffusion_, ibid.

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rifleman and tanks that had changed little since WW2, now had to train,

maintain, sustain, and fight a complex array of weapons and support

systems.[8]

The Gulf War further illustrates the demands that changes place on

the operational commander. Viewed in retrospect as a triumph of new

technology and the post-Vietnam rebuilding of the US military, the war also

illustrated the limited effectiveness of some specific changes. For

example, the quality and quantity of information available to the commander

greatly complicated the commander's task and had the unintended consequence

of diminishing control.

"The constant pressure of the data stream," notes Eliot Cohen,

"together with the growth of nighttime operations, means that leaders try

to keep on top of events at the cost of sleep and acuity." This also

complicates future readiness and training. The risk of over dependence on

futuristic capabilities and detailed information is the inability to

operate without them. The high tech Goliath could prove any easy prey for

a low tech David. "(F)uture warriors," writes Cohen, "may paradoxically

find themselves all the more at a loss when the real world differs sharply

from a familiar cyberworld."[9]

While on the surface it is possible to isolate individual elements

like technology that lead to change, seemingly distinct elements of change

are often significantly interrelated. For example, the defense buildup

that resulted in the M1 and M2 were related to the Soviet invasion of

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[8]A thorough study of this period of complex change and its impact can be found in Chris C. Demchak, Military Organizations, Complex Machines: Modernization in the US Armed Services, (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), pp. 41-61, 164-166. Comments in this portion of the paper are also based on the author's experience as an officer in US Army Europe, 1980-1984.
[9]Eliot A. Cohen, "The Mystique of US. Air Power," Foreign Affairs 73 (January/February 1994): 114-115

Afghanistan and other shifts in the international environment. The gradual increase in real spending on defense since the late 1970's allowed the military to modernize consistent with advances in technology.

At the same time, the traditional issue of inter service rivalry took a new twist. Pressures to increase joint service interoperability began to build after the failure of DESERT ONE, the mission to rescue US hostages held in Iran. It increased after a series of anecdotal incidents that occurred during OPERATION URGENT FURY, the invasion of Grenada. Confusion in planning and incompatibility of communication and fire support systems led to Congressionally mandated initiatives in training, planning, and Joint Staff personnel policies.[10]

The operational commander, already burdened with dramatic changes in his organic weapons systems, now had greater *responsibility for integrating* the capabilities of other services into his planning and operations. Competition for quality subordinate officer to fill key positions in the operational commander's units was now complicated by requirements to train and utilize those officers in key joint duty billets. Outstanding officers could no longer secure their futures by following the single path of their parent service.

Fluctuations in the budget have also clearly required responses by the operational commander's to deal with the leadership challenges of "downsizing" units and limited training operations funding. Traditional military leadership patterns and procedures have been challenged by a series of dramatic changes in the social makeup of the military force. In the past 20 years, leaders have had to ensure that their units adjust to

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[10]Wayne Maynard, "The New American Way of War," <u>Military Review</u>, 73 (November 1993) pp.6-8.

the introduction of the all volunteer force, the increasing number of married military personnel, the gradual opening of opportunities for service by women, and change in missions from traditional warfare on isolated battlefields to humanitarian assistance operations conducted under the glare of television lights.

Ensuring effective change is clearly no simple task. The operational commander cannot defer responsibility to the senior leadership making the initial authority decision. Nor can the commander assume that a single order will make it so.[11] Implementing effective change at the operational commander's level means understanding, initiating, and following through a wide range of complex, inter-related actions. It is a monumental leadership challenge.

The dramatic changes faced by American operational commanders are formidable, but not without precedent. The Soviet military was decimated internally by Stalin's purges and suffered major defeats in early battles. It reinvented and rebuilt itself in the midst of a brutal war on its own soil and defeated the powerful German military.[12] At the same time, the French military--demoralized and nearly defeated in World War I and then rebuilt into one of the worlds largest and most modern forces--was crushed in a matter of weeks in 1940.[13] If the motives for change are present, and if the failure to implement effective responses to change risks national

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[11]"...as any seasoned hand well knows, the crystal-clear so-called military model--give an order and get instant compliance--doesn't even hold for the military." Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies, (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) pp. 90-91.

[12]Norman F. Dixon, On The Psychology of Military Incompetence, (London: Futura, 1976), p. 346; Dwight D. Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), pp. 467-469.

[13]Posen, Source, pp. 105-140.

disaster, why do militaries fail to implement effective change and how much of this failure is the responsibility of the operational commander?

CHAPTER III

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CHANGE: THE INDIVIDUAL

*"I turned my back on the opportunity I had dreamed of since
my days as a cadet. For me, one of the biggest battles of the war
was off..."*

Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey,USN[14]

Admiral "Bull" Halsey was a visionary. When other surface warriors

balked at the idea of naval air power, Halsey saw it as the future. He

qualified as an aviator and gambled his career on the importance of carrier

warfare. At Midway, his subordinates feared the costs of his absence and

worried that surface warrior Raymond Spruance would not understand how to

best employ this new weapons system.[15]

But when the battle of the Leyte Gulf came, Halsey's instinct was

that of a traditional surface warrior, not of an aviator. He left the

invasion force behind and went in search of a battleship engagement.

Halsey's experience demonstrates one of the operational commander's most

significant barriers to change—an individual's beliefs and instincts.

Those who study the process of change note that often, the most

difficult tasks is discarding the frameworks we create to help us explain

and deal with daily life and its challenges and responsibilities. Walter

Lippman noted that

> ...the real environment is altogether too big, too complex,
> and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped
> deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations
> and combinations. And although we have to act in that
> environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before
> we can manage it.[16]

[14]William F. Halsey and J. Bryan III, <u>Admiral Halsey's Story</u>, (New York:
McGraw-Hill, 1947), p. 221.
[15]T.B. Buell, <u>The Quiet Warrior</u>, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987)
pp. 132-166; Halsey and Bryan, <u>Halsey's Story</u>, ibid.
[16]Walter Lippmann, <u>Public Opinion</u>, (New York: MacMillan, 1922/1960) p. 16.

Lippmann's argument is at odds with the classic "rational actor" view of decision making. This theory contends that rational decisions can be made by objectively bringing all relevant information to bear on the problem and comparing, first, the "relative effectiveness of alternative means for achieving the goal," then, "the effects on values other than those that would be fulfilled by achieving the immediate end," and finally by alternative ends in light of the costs "in terms of other values."[17]. This efficient model provides an optimal outcome. Unfortunately, the majority findings of those who study the process of individual decision making side more often with Lippmann than with the rational actor model. The post World War II "cognitive revolution" in social psychology resulted in a wide range of studies illuminating human behavior in general and decision making in particular. A number of the research findings in this body of research provides valuable insights into the obstacles operational commanders must overcome in their own decision making and in the decision making of their subordinates.

An individual does not normally approach the task of decision making objectively and comprehensively. From the perspective of cognitive social psychology, individuals are severely limited in the amount of information they can process. They develop theories--often naive at best--based on experience and long standing beliefs. When confronted with a decision, these theories are an individual's default setting. This is particularly true in times of crisis. These cognitive shortcuts serve as a means of

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[17]This summary of Max Weber's original model and a number of its relevant variants is provided in Roger Hilsman, The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs: Conceptual Models and Bureaucratic Politics, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1987), pp. 45-46.

making inferences and decisions with a minimal expenditure of time and energy.[18]

All individuals interpret specific situations in light of more general stored knowledge. They make judgments about events, people, or objects by quickly placing them into apriori categories. These economical judgments provide a guide to the retrieval and storage of mental information, and fill in missing or ambiguous information with "default values". In short, information is processed from the "top down" based on preconceived theories structured to organize and explain the world, rather than by the harsh realities of new data that may clash with those theories.[19]

In the face of these barriers, change is often slow and incremental at best. Individuals seek information that is consistent with pre-existing beliefs and will often go so far as to shut down the evaluation process and

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[18]Robert Jervis, "Political Decision Making: Recent Contributions," Political Psychology, 2, (1980) pp. 98-100. Jervis notes that these preconceived views, or biases, are both motivated and unmotivated. Motivated biases are "...motivated in the sense of guiding the person to a goal, buttressing a decision or protecting a persons ego." Unmotivated biases are those that "...have no such basis, but are errors the person would correct if he were aware of them." This is all complicated by the facts that individuals are driven more by theory than by data, they do not realize they treat information this way, they overestimate the complexity of their own thought process, and they are reluctant to realize tradeoffs. Jervis sees most biases as unmotivated, but this provides little comfort because the problem is "not that we have too few (unmotivated biases) but that we have too many." ;Deborah Larson, Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1985) pp. 50-52.
[19]Larson, Origins, ibid. This award winning and exhaustive study of applied decision making theory draws extensively on the major contemporary works in psychology; Examples of the applications of these theories to strategic level decisions can be found in the studies of analogous thinking by decision makers. These works include Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decision of 1965, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1992) and Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers, (New York: Free Press, 1986).

come to premature mental "closure" rather than contend with complex, challenging decisions. They want to maintain the consistency they have mentally structured, particularly when new situations and new information threatens that order.[20]

What does this mean for an operational commander and his subordinates? When faced with a decision--particularly in times of crisis--existing beliefs and theories will take over as they did for Halsey at Leyte Gulf. Sometimes the results can be positive. Arguably, MacArthur's bold move at Inchon was the result of invoking his long held and consistently exercised theories about maneuver warfare. By the same token, his failure to grasp the realities of the post-World War II era led to his failure to understand the global political dimensions of the Korean War and his confrontation with President Truman.

"(W)e professional soldiers are traditionally laggard in facing and adopting changes," James Gavin wrote in 1947, "especially radical changes that upset proven methods and the ways in which we have been doing things for years past."[21]

Lieutenant General James M. Gavin was clearly an exception to his own rule. Tapped for future greatness by General George Marshall, Gavin rose from Captain (O-3) in 1941 to Major General (O-8) and command of the 82nd Airborne Division in 1944. Like many of his World War II contemporaries, he was an outstanding leader who successfully implemented changes needed to transform the small, outdated Regular Army of the 1930's into the complex, modern force that triumphed in World War II.

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[20]Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception in International Politics, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) pp. 195-196.
[21]James M. Gavin, Airborne Warfare, (Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947) p. 140.

As one of the first officers to volunteer for airborne duty, he was responsible for developing airborne forces doctrine, training the embryonic airborne units, and leading them into battle from Sicily to Berlin.[22] Later, serving on Army Staff, he continued to be an innovator. He initiated the development of helicopter tactics, modern missile artillery, and space age military technology. He was also an early critic of America's military operations in Vietnam.[23]

Gavin, and many other officers of his generation who effectively advocated and implemented change, exhibited a number of the positive characteristics of innovators and "early adopters" enumerated by Rogers and Shoemaker, to include the following:

1. They were intelligent

2. They had a more favorable attitude toward change

3. They actively sought information about innovations

4. They had more education

5. They had a more favorable attitude toward risks

6. They were less dogmatic[24]

There are notable exceptions to the rule, but their lack of professional rigidity may have been tied to the fact that many of them were junior in rank and had little or no combat experience in World War I. The experiences and analogies of the last war had little value to them. Those like Patton who had experienced combat focused on the failure to exploit innovations that might have broken the bloody stalemate on the Western

[22]Gavin, On to Berlin, (New York: Bantam, 1979).
[23]Gavin, Airborne, pp. 140-160; see also Gavin's War and Peace in the Space Age, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1958) and Crisis Now, (New York: Random House, 1968).
[24]Rogers and Shoemaker, Communication, pp. 347-385.

Front.[25] Eisenhower's goal in Europe had been to avoid "...the long , dreary, and wasteful battles that bled Europe white in World War I."[26]

Gavin's recognition of individual barriers to change and his own considerable skills as an innovator were not always sufficient to ensure success. In the 1950's, Gavin and other innovators would run into considerable opposition to innovation and effective change both from within the military and from the civilian leadership.[27] Individual behavior is not the only barrier that must be overcome. Once leaders at the operational level overcome their own individual barriers to effectively contending with change, they must overcome the collective and interactive responses of other individuals in formal organizations.

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[25]"After the war," Patton wrote in 1918, "I am never going to work for a month and then start getting ready for the next war." John Toland, <u>No Man's Land: 1918, The Last Year of the Great War</u>, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980) p. 130.
[26]Eisenhower, <u>Crusade</u>, p. 449.
[27]Gavin, <u>Space Age</u>, pp. 155-157.

CHAPTER IV

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CHANGE: THE ORGANIZATION

*"Of the twenty major technological developments which lie
between the first marine engine and the Polaris submarine, the
Admiralty machine has discouraged, delayed, obstructed or
positively rejected seventeen."*
David Divine
The Blunted Sword[28]

The difficulty of changing an organization is determined in large
part by the type of organization confronted with change. Militaries are
best understood as bureaucracies. Military professionals often balk at
being labeled with a term usually associated with civilian institutions.
The word "bureaucracy" conjures images that are the antithesis of the
precision, efficiency, and professionalism of the ideal military.

However, virtually every classic definition of bureaucracy applies to
the makeup and operation of military forces. When Max Weber authored his
classic text on bureaucracy, he chose the military as his model. As
bureaucracies, militaries are subject to unique limitations and constraints
on large, hierarchical organizations when they attempt to institute
changes.[29]

"Organizations, like individuals, are reluctant to accept any change
in their environments--whether good or bad--as permanent," notes Anthony
Downs, "if such acceptance would require them to make a significant
alteration in their customary behavior patterns."[30] This bureaucratic
inertia is not only understandable, it is also beneficial. A bureaucracy
is, by definition, a government agency with a public trust. Success or

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[28]Dixon, *Incompetence*, p. 119.
[29]In addition to Weber, most other students of bureaucracy use the military
as an example of this organizational type. See, for example, James Q.
Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*, (New
York: Basic Books, 1989). pp. 3-6, 15-18
[30]Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967)p. 174.

failure has a broader public impact than the profits or losses of a private corporation. Therefore, stability mitigates risk.[31] Risk for a military is literally a life and death proposition.

But the reverse can also be true. Failure to change increases risk. The consistent refusal of the British Military to accept the importance of mechanization and the potential of naval air power jeopardized its readiness until well into the 1930's. Despite the experiences of the cavalry against tanks in World War I, Britain continued to cling to the importance of horse cavalry until the early years of World War II.[32]

When viewed in a larger context and across the span of time, most changes are the result of an evolutionary or incremental process. But the defining moments in significant changes are most often associated with dramatic events. These dramatic events lead to two contradictory forces that affect bureaucratic organizations. First, they react by closing ranks, seeking refuge in tradition and long standing procedures. In so doing, they also reinforce a shared reluctance to confront information and opinions that contradict the organization's norms and beliefs.[33]

At the same time, the organization is faced with powerful external demands to reform and restructure. In democracies, these pressures come from the civilian leadership that provides the fiscal resources for military operations. The pressures accelerate in the wake of a major failure (actual or perceived) of the organization to perform its principal mission. In the wake of a major success, however, the organization is far more risk averse, preferring to rely on proven tactics, techniques, force

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[31]Downs, Inside, p. 174.
[32]Dixon, Incompetence, pp. 111-118.
[33]Irving L. Janis, Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982) pp. 174-177.

structures and technologies. Thus after a major victory like World War II, or the Persian Gulf War, or even after a deterrent success like the end of the Cold War, the military is reluctant to accept change to an organization that has proven itself. This holds true regardless of how little relation projected future challenges may have to the events and circumstances of the past.[34] Therefore, the military proves unprepared for a limited war like Korea or the unconventional demands of modern peace keeping and peace enforcement mission.

There is a great deal of truth, then, to the old cliché about armies preparing to fight the last war. Victory constraints rather than frees the victor and complacency becomes the rule. "In theory," notes Norman Dixon, " a major war should confer benefits on the armed forces of the victor. New lessons have been learned, new technologies developed and new confidence found. Thus equipped, they should have a head start on preparations for the next war. In practice, the rever: ? seems to be the case."[35]

It would appear that without external pressures, the military will normally only overcome inertia on its own and move toward change after a major military failure, like Vietnam or Korea. Even in these cases, the type of change needed can be the subject of internal debate only resolved by external political pressure. But the impetus for change is not restricted to the debate between the senior national security decision makers.

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[34]The recurring themes of militaries changing in the wake of failure and the importance of external pressures can be found in a number of sources. For the most thorough summary of this, see Waddell, "The Army", ibid.
[35]Dixon, Incompetence, p. 110.

In almost every contemporary case, the civilian leadership has
capitalized on proposals generated inside the military by officers at the
operational level. The rise of US. Army Special Forces is often credited
to the Kennedy Administration. The early Special Forces doctrine and
force structure resulted from the efforts of numerous operational level
officers who clashed with the prevailing 1950's doctrine of "Massive
Retaliation". Special forces units, it was argued, represented one of the
essential elements of a ground force capable of reacting to challenges that
might arise all along the spectrum of conflict.[36]

Between World War I and World War II, junior officers at the
operational level advanced proposals for changes in doctrine, force
structure, and military technology. Their ideas were initially met with
varying degrees of success. Those who argued for change in the wake of
victory often suffered isolation, discredit, and in the extreme,
elimination from the military. In Britain, J.F.C. Fuller and Liddell Hart
were both shunned and condemned by the mainstream military for their
continued advocacy of mechanization. It was the advocacy of outsiders like
Winston Churchill's that kept their ideas in the forefront, even when
Fuller was forced to retire after three years without a formal
assignment.[37]

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[36]This debate resulted in the little chronicled "Colonels' Revolt", so
named for the Army Staff officers who leaked word of this heated policy
debate to the press and publicly challenged the Secretary of Defense and
the Joint Chiefs of Staff on this issue. One of the few published accounts
of the revolt is found in David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest,
(New York: Random House, 1972) pp. 573-579. The accounts of two key
participants in this policy debate can be found in Maxwell D. Taylor,
Uncertain Trumpet, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), pp. 23-79 and
Matthew B. Ridgway, Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway, (New York:
Harper and Brothers, 1956) pp. 266-273, 286-294.
[37]Dixon, Incompetence, pp. 112-114.

Billy Mitchell was an early Air Force prophet without honor. Like his doctrinal mentor, Douhet, he was court martialled. American air power came to pass because of the overwhelming tide of world events and political pressure combined with a realization by the Navy and Army that both could benefit. Mitchell did not live to see this come to pass.[38] Liddell Hart wrote of how even the "success" of a new idea ultimately cost its advocates. A wall of "...obstruction-compounded of resentment, suspicion and inertia..." was built up to block the advocate of new ideas , he said, "...as the wall finally yields to the pressure on the new idea it falls and crushes him."[39]

The fault for this cannot be linked to the actions of any one individual in opposition to change. It was the collective pressure of the military organization and its bureaucratic norms. "It seems quite possible," notes Robert Presthus, "that, as well as being agents of change, modern complex organizations are equally well suited and disposed toward suffocating it."[40]

These barriers have been successfully confronted with leadership and support at levels above the operational commander. The American military's recovery from Vietnam was largely the result of leadership initiatives at the highest levels. This is consistent with research that shows militaries generating reform internally in the wake of failure.[41] The success in Grenada and Panama, however, did not hinder the ongoing modernization of the force that led to success in the Gulf War. In fact, the Army's

[38]Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977) pp. 223-241.
[39]Dixon, Incompetence, p.114.
[40]Robert Presthus, The Organizational Society, (New York: St. Martin's, 1978).
[41]Posen, Sources, pp. 221-228; Waddell, "The Army,", ibid.

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successful utilization of light forces to secure victory in both Grenada and Panama might have justified predictions of a shift to light forces as the basis for the already downsizing Army prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This did not occur and, in fact, the ongoing force reductions have been a virtual balance of light and heavy forces as the Army continues to shrink after DESERT STORM.

Earlier lessons can be drawn from the American experience between the wars. While Mitchell suffered for his advocacy, others survived. George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower and many lesser known officers championed many of the same ideas in America than Hart and Fuller advanced in Britain. Their time between the wars was marked with slow promotions and dismal duty, but when war came they were able to realize the value of their earlier vision.[42] They benefited from innovative advanced military schooling at staff and war colleges, opportunities to write professionally, and mentors like Marshall and Pershing's World War I Chief of Staff Major General Fox Conner.[43] Not all of them achieved wartime prominence. Some were not still on active service in 1941. But when war came, the US had a strong cadre of innovative officers to assign as operational commanders.[44]

[42]For an interesting collection of works written between the World Wars, see Joseph I. Greene, ed., The Infantry Journal Reader, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1943). This anthology of articles from the influential US Army publication includes works by Patton, General Joseph Stillwell, General Claire Chennault, Marshall, and others written when they were young company and field grade officers.
[43]Halberstam, Best and Brightest, pp. 390-391. Halberstam discusses George Marshall and his mentorship of many of those who served with distinction in World War II and key post-war political and diplomatic posts. Marshall's role as mentor is mentioned frequently in the biographies of Eisenhower, Ridgway, and others. Eisenhower frequently discusses Marshall in Crusade in Europe. Conner is even accorded a special mention in the displays at the Eisenhower Museum and Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas.
[44]Many of these officers performed the same function for the next generation of Army leaders. Ridgway and Taylor were among the more well know mentors. Another noteworthy judge of talent was Major General George "Abe" Lincoln. One of the youngest general officers on Marshall's staff

The success of those who challenge conventional wisdom in the American military is not always assured. The experience of US. Army Special Forces provides a case in point. Shunned at first, then advanced by the political leadership, it would sink into disfavor and become a career backwater in the late 1960's and early 1970's.[45] It was revived in the late 1970's, then institutionalized as part of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), a unified combatant command that demonstrated its value during DESERT STORM.[46]

Organizational barriers can be overcome, but not without costs. They recurring patterns for successful implementation of effective change include:

1. A willingness by the innovator to take professional risks

2. An awareness of the need for bureaucratic mentors and allies

3. Awareness of and involvement in innovation initiatives by higher military and civilian leadership

4. Patience with organizational inertia on the part of those advocating change

5. Patience with those advocating innovation on the part of the bureaucracy

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and later legendary head of the US .ilitary Academy's Department of Social Sciences, Lincoln helped guide the careers of (among others) Presidential advisor and NATO Commander General Andrew Goodpaster and Colonel (later Secretary of State) Dean Rusk. Halberstam, Best and Brightest, pp. 389-391.
[45]Krepinevich, Vietnam, ibid.
[46]Maynard, "Way of War," pp. 12-14.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

"It is the eternal responsibility of the operational commander to fill the gaps between pre-hostilities planning and the real situation he faces. There is no other person who can bear this heavy responsibility."

> Captain Yoji Koda
> Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force[47] -

History teaches us that nations have risen and fallen on the ability

of their militaries to deal effectively with change. The study of

individuals and organizations teaches us that ability is not easily

obtained or exercised. For the operational commander, there are several

imperatives for ensuring effective change.

First and foremost, commanders must know and understand their own

psychological strengths and limitations and those of their subordinates.

Contending with individual barriers to effective change requires not just

an awareness of the obstacles but possession of the skills to overcome

them. While personality traits like openness and risk acceptance are not

easily learned at an advanced age and career status, education (formal and

informal) can provide an understanding of innovations and their full

implications.

Next, it is not enough to master and adhere to the doctrine and

practices accepted by the mainstream. The "school solution" must be

constantly challenged. The ideas and proposals that appear to most

threaten an operational commanders own domain may, in fact, provide the

most significant opportunities for success. Patton once declared that the

saddest moment of his life was the day his cavalry unit gave up its

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[47]Koda, "A Commander's Dilemma: Admiral Yamamoto and the "Gradual Attrition Strategy," _Naval War College Review_, 46 (Autumn 1993) p. 74.

horses.[48] His personal dismay, however, did not stop him from embracing the possibilities of modern armored warfare.

Third, this openness must be continually renewed. Those who innovate with one generation may serve as obstacles in the next. Many of the same officers who benefited as subalterns from the favorable innovations of the late 1930's and early 1940's served as obstacles to the innovators of the 1950's and 1960's.[49]

Fourth, as the leaders at the crossroads of innovation, operational commanders can also help mitigate the obstacles presented by organizational limitations. The nurturing of new ideas and the mentoring of those willing to adopt and advance them is an operational commander's responsibility. The leaders who set the command climate can determine the success or failure of innovation. In numerous examples the willingness to mentor innovators is a significant factor in a military's ability to effectively adapt to change.

Finally, there must be an acceptance of the personal risks of supporting innovation. In a profession where the willingness to risk life and limb are a given, the risks to professional status can be no less acceptable. The patience needed to see important innovations accepted by the mainstream may require falling off the accepted path to success. For every Gavin or Patton, there is a Fuller or Hart. Had it not been for World War II (and the retirement of his arch rival, Douglas Mac Arthur), George Marshall might have finished his career as a Colonel instructing the Illinois National Guard.[50]

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[48]Dixon, Incompetence, p. 118.
[49]See Krepinevich, Vietnam, pp. 4-7.
[50]William Manchester, American Caesar, (New York: Dell, 1978) p. 171.

In the final analysis, the effective implementation of change starts with the recognition that the operational commander does not train, plan, lead, and fight to ensure the success or failure of a particular tactic, doctrine, or weapon system. The operational commander's mission is to prepare and employ the nation's military in the optimal manner necessary to ensure the defense of the vital national interests.

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